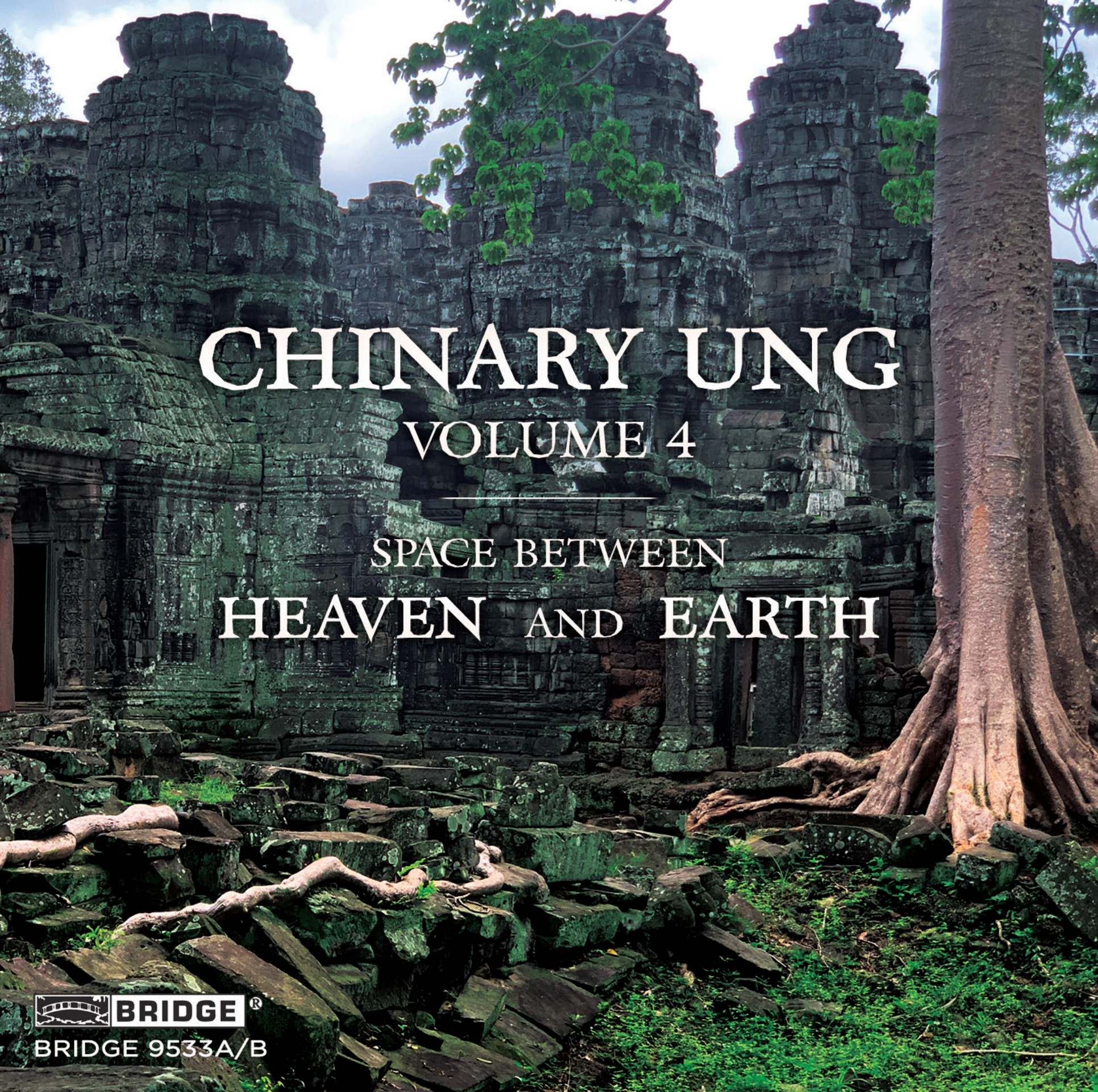
CHINARY UNG
VOLUME 4
SPACE BETWEEN
HEAVEN AND EARTH
BRIDGE®
BRIDGE 9533A/B

Chinary Ung

(b. 1942)

Space Between Heaven and Earth

Disc A (69:14)

1) Singing Inside Aura (2013) (14:32)

Susan Ung, viola
Curtis Macomber, violin
Michael Lipsey, percussion
Patricia Spencer, flute
Blair McMillen, piano
Nicholas Terry, percussion
Meighan Stoops, clarinet
James Wilson, cello
James Baker, conductor

2) Spiral XIV: Nimitta (2012) (16:57)

Brian Walsh, clarinet · Nicholas Terry and Justin DeHart, percussion
Shannon Wettstein, piano

3) Spiral I (1987) (15:36)

Felix Fan, cello · Matthew Gold, percussion · Aleck Karis, piano

4) Therigatha Inside Aura (2018) (22:06)

Anne Harley, soprano · Stacey Fraser, soprano · Brian Walsh, clarinet
Susan Ung, viola · Nicholas Terry, percussion · David Rentz, conductor

Disc B (39:11)

1) Spiral XII: Space Between Heaven and Earth (2008) (39:11)

Elissa Johnston, solo soprano I
Kathleen Roland-Silverstein, solo soprano II
Susan Narucki, soprano
Stacey Fraser, soprano
Hillary Jean Young, alto
Anne Harley, alto
Jon Lee Keenan, tenor
Todd Strange, tenor
Joseph Lopez, tenor
Abdiel Gonzales, baritone
Jonathan Nussman, baritone
James Hayden, bass
Reid Bruton, bass
Wilfrido Terrazas, flute
Paul Sherman, oboe
Robert Zelickman, clarinet
Fiona Digney, percussion
Benjamin Rempel, percussion
Shalini Vijayan, violin
Batya MacAdam-Somer, violin
Susan Ung, viola
Peter Jacobson, cello
Matthew Kline, double bass
Gil Rose, conductor

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In 1987 Chinary Ung wrote **Spiral I**, for piano, 'cello, and percussion, finding fertile territory in the metaphor of something winding continuously around a fixed point. This concept yielded two important ideas for a musical work: orientation and recursion, and while the composer did not set out to establish a series (the original title was, simply, "Spiral"), it is somehow fitting that there are now 15 *Spiral* pieces. In each one there tends to be a central, recurrent idea that is re-imagined over the course of the work and the spiral idea itself is re-imagined in each new instantiation. With **Spiral I**, along with the orchestral work **Inner Voices** (1986), Ung quickly established a potent compositional voice after a decade of almost no composing. During this hiatus he was consumed by efforts to document and preserve Khmer traditional music, and to aid Cambodian refugees, particularly children, who had fled the horrors of the Cambodian genocide. The cataclysmic suffering of the Cambodian people, the loss of its cultural heritage, and the death of so many members of his own family had a profound impact on Ung's life, of course, but it also gave new purpose to his compositional approach.

Ung was inspired by his mentor, Chou Wen-chung, to pursue a music that explored cross-cultural practices that were not encumbered by the Modernist techniques he had acquired in his formal studies. In Ung's view, a full embrace of Southeast Asian aesthetics would eventually provide a space for healing. His own term for the "style" of music that evolved was *futuristic folk music*, which, generally speaking, he approaches through two processes: quotation and evocation. He employs quotations sparingly, sometimes in brief melodic passages by using a folk tune, or, in other instances by recomposing (and elaborating upon) fragments of traditional music. Although these may be sufficiently altered to obscure their original identity, their character is unmistakable. More often, Ung evokes a traditional music by replicating its textures, such as in an early passage of **Spiral I,** in which steadily overlapping arpeggios in unison rhythm reminds the listener of the Cambodian *Pinpeat* ensemble.

This is not to suggest that these are the only Southeast Asian elements incorporated into Ung's music. Aside from referencing traditional music through quotation and evocation, Ung's music is deeply suffused with Asian features, including modal writing, the use of drones, mi-

crotonal inflections, elaborate percussion sections, and, perhaps most importantly, an expansive, even languid approach to musical time. The frequent use of octaves, fifths (particularly the lowest open strings on 'cello and viola), and the non-functional use of triadic harmony (with flexible 3rd relations) are perhaps the clearest break with the Modernist-influenced music Ung composed in the early 1970s, whereas his keen interest in timbre places his work alongside that of George Crumb (another important mentor) in its imaginative use of extended instrumental techniques. Ung incorporates these ideas into a seamless, coherent musical language that effectively evokes images and figures from Southeast Asia. By the late 1990s, however, he sought to expand this language in order to more directly address his ambitions for his music to gain the capacity to alleviate suffering. Thinking about the intimacy and inherent humanity of the voice, he began to incorporate the use of singing, chanting, and other vocal behaviors into his instrumental writing. Given the often-extravagant nature of Ung's instrumental writing, this intensification of responsibilities is a demanding enterprise for the performer.

A high point in this practice was reached with **Spiral XI: Mother and Child** (2007), for viola, written for Susan Ung. Over the course of the past several years, Mrs. Ung has made the work her own, effectively codifying a performance practice around her immersion in the peculiar demands introduced in that particular piece. As she puts it, one must be of two minds at once when singing and playing simultaneously. With **Singing Inside Aura** (2013), Chinary Ung placed the singing violist in a concerto context. The chamber ensemble version of the piece recorded here is no mere arrangement, however; it is a thorough re-composition that invests a substantial degree of energy in the septet of instruments that accompanies the viola solo.

The text that is spoken, sung, and chanted by the soloist and ensemble is drawn mostly from Khmer and Pali. For the most part, these words and syllables are chosen for their sonic character as opposed to their meaning. There are exceptions, however, such as in the Coda. There, Pali words are used in a chant-like passage. These words include *Akasa* (space), *Monomaya* (the power of spiritual creation), and *Nana Vpphara* (the power of penetrating knowledge).

Spiral XIV: Nimitta (2012) inevitably invokes ensemble traditions such as the Khmer Pinpeat and Balinese *Gamelan* through its use of mallet instruments and bells in the two percussion parts. In some ways, these are the surface aspects that align this music with Ung's native Cambodia, but the deep structure lies in the spiritual association of the voice. In Pali the word *Nimitta* means a sign or image received through meditation. This image could be of the future or the past, or it may be a manifestation of ultimate consciousness. *Nimitta* is the result of a practice, or discipline, not unlike that which is required to perform the music.

Although most of Chinary Ung's compositions are instrumental music he has occasionally dabbled in the theatrical. His 2005 epic, **Aura**, was a kind of oratorio, in which two sopranos engage in a mystic journey among a dynamic, vocalizing chamber orchestra. The most recent work on this recording, **Therīgāthā Inside Aura** (2017), begins with a quotation from **Aura** in which a suspended chorale texture refers to the moment of the Buddha's enlightenment, when a multicolored aura emerged around his head. The Therīgāthā, also known as "Verses of the Elder Nuns," is a set of ancient texts describing the experiences

of nuns who were active during the Buddha's lifetime. Ung presents the texts in the original Pali along with translations into Khmer and English in an interlocking tapestry in which the measured approach of spoken word overlaps with the fragility of "untrained" singing voices and the power of classically trained sopranos, the latter of which introduce a new expressive component into Ung's language: exaltation.

With **Spiral XII: "Space Between Heaven and Earth"** (2008) Ung ventured into the domain of the spectacle, in which a mixed chorus of 40 singers played alongside a vocalizing chamber orchestra that was particularly rich with Asian percussion instruments while Cambodian dancers performed new work choreographed by Sophiline Cheam Shapiro.

This current arrangement eliminates the dance component and reduces both the instrumental ensemble and the chorus, which is now re-conceived as a group of 13 soloists. Through these leaner resources, Ung takes a focused approach through the same material, in a work of nearly 40 minutes. The piece addresses, as he puts it, "the richness of the culture of Cambodia" in two sections. Part I: "Song Offerings" is

intended to be music for the spirits. This sets the stage for the much longer Part II: "Space Between Heaven and Earth," which invokes the Buddhist principle of emptiness in order to relieve suffering, particularly that of the Cambodian people. The "space" that Ung invokes in Part II is often registral; the lowest notes in the string ensemble are sustained while fluttering, spiraling figures abound in the high woodwinds. Whereas the *shunyata* or "bubble" of Buddhist teaching would only require that empty space be formed between these boundaries, it is in Ung's nature to fill it – to think about who might benefit from its peaceful presence. In this case, the Bass singers have a prominent part, thereby rooting this space towards the ground, to the human realm, where all the suffering takes place and yet where compassion is also found.

I will leave the reader with one final image to contemplate. Roughly two thirds of the way into **Spiral XIV** there is a duo for the two percussionists, who play non-pitched instruments along with vocalizations. In the score appears the phrase "Intertwining Dragons," which is a reference to the ancient Cambodian site *Neak Pean* in which a small temple sits atop a small island in the middle of a large pool

of water. The site was a sort of hospital, and a soak in the surrounding waters would restore one's health. The base of the temple is surrounded by sculptures of intertwining serpents, or *Naga*. Snakes and dragons have special status in Khmer mythology. They are excellent protectors, they cannot be tamed, and their ability to molt is a sign of constant renewal. Thus, the percussionists are transformed into fierce protectors – immortal avatars of healing.

Adam Greene is a composer living in San Diego. He holds degrees in music composition from UC San Diego (Ph.D.) and the New England Conservatory of Music (M.M.).

ខ ១០៧ ភទ្ទា កុណ្ឌលកីសា	**Verse 107: Bhaddā Kuṇḍalakesā**
lūnakeśī paṅkadharī ekasāṭī pure cariṃ *avajje vajjamatinī vajje cāvajjadassinī.*	Head shaved, wearing dirt, formerly I roamed having only a single robe, thinking something blameable in what was not blameable, and seeing in what was blameable, the not blameable. [BL]
ខ ១០៨ ភទ្ទា កុណ្ឌលកេសា	**Verse 108: Bhaddā Kuṇḍalakesā**
ចេញទៅអំពីទីសម្រាកក្នុងវេលាថ្ងៃ បានឃើញព្រះពុទ្ធ ទ្រង់ប្រាសចាកធូលីគឺរាគាទិក្កិលេស មានភិក្ខុសង្ឃបរិហារមកលើភ្នំគិជ្ឈកូដ ។	Leaving behind my daytime shelter, I saw the Buddha, who had left behind the dust of passion and desire, surrounded by monks on Gijjhakūṭa Mountain. [CU]
ខ ១០៩ ភទ្ទា កុណ្ឌលកេសា	**Verse 109: Bhaddā Kuṇḍalakesā**
ក៏លុតជង្គង់ថ្វាយបង្គំប្រណម្យអញ្ជលីក្នុងទីចំពោះព្រះភក្ត្រ ។ ព្រះមានព្រះភាគបានត្រាស់ថា ម្នាលនាង នាងចូរមកចុះ ឧបសម្បទានោះក៏សម្រេចដល់ខ្ញុំ ។	I knelt and paid homage to him, my hands in prayer before him. The Blessed One said, “O lady, come . . . ,” and that was my ordination. [CU]
ខ ១៦ សុមនា	**Verse 16 Sumanā**
ម្នាលនាងចំរើនដោយសីលាទិគុណ នាងចូរដេកស្រួល នាងចូរធ្វើ (ចីវរ) ដោយសំពត់ (បង្សុកូល) ស្លៀកដណ្តប់ ព្រោះថាបើរាគៈរបស់នាងសូន្យរម្ងាប់ហើយ នាងនឹងជាស្ត្រីមានចិត្តត្រជាក់រលត់កិលេស ។	O lady, you’ve developed your virtues, including those of ethical conduct. Sleep well; cover yourself with the robe you made from the shroud of a corpse, since if your passion is receding, or already gone, you will attain true calm, free from suffering and desire. [CU]
ខ ៧ វីរា	**Verse 7 Vīrā**
វីរាភិក្ខុនី មានឥន្ទ្រិយអប់រំហើយ ដោយធម៌ទាំងឡាយជាប្រធាននៃព្យាយាម នាងចូរផ្តាច់នូវមារ ព្រមទាំងវាហនៈ ហើយទ្រទ្រង់នូវរាងកាយជាទីបំផុត ។	Vira, nun, your mind is tamed by means of your qualities, such as your perseverance. Lady, you should defeat the devil, along with his army, and take care of this, your final body. [CU]
ខ ៥១ ឧព្ពិរិ	**Verse 51 Ubbiri**
amma jīvāti vanamhi kandasi attānaṃ adhigaccha ubbiri *cullāsītisahassāni sabbā jīvasanāmikā* *etamhālāhane daḍḍhā tāsaṃ kam anusocasi.*	“Daughter, Jiva!” “Know yourself, Ubbiri. There are 84,000 burnt in this cemetery, and they all have the name Jiva. For which one are you mourning?” [BL]

ខ ៥២ ឧព្ពិរិ	**Verse 52 Ubbiri**
abbahī vata me sallaṃ duddasaṃ hadayassitaṃ *yaṃ me sokaparetāya dhītusokaṃ vyapānudi.*	He drew out this dart of mine, difficult to understand, connected to the heart, which removed my sorrow over my daughter[‘s death from me,] overcome with grief. [BL]
ខ ៥២ ឧព្ពិរិ	**Verse 52 Ubbiri**
សរគឺសេចក្តីសោក អាស្រ័យនូវហឫទ័យរបស់ខ្ញុំព្រះអង្គ ជារបស់ដែលគេឃើញដោយក្រ បានរដកចេញហើយ ព្រះអង្គបាន បន្ទោបង់នូវសេចក្តីសោកព្រោះកូនស្រីរបស់ខ្ញុំព្រះអង្គ ដែលត្រូវសេចក្តីសោកគ្របសង្កត់ហើយ ។	An arrow is my grief. It lies in my heart, but only rarely can it be seen. After removing the arrow, the Buddha had released my grief over my daughter’s death, a grief that had smothered me. [CU]
ខ ២៩ មេត្តិកា	**Verse 29 Mettikā**
kiñcāpi khomhi dukkhitā dubbalā gatayobbanā *daṇḍamolubbha gacchāmi pabbataṃ abhirūhiya.*	Although I am afflicted, weak, and my youth is gone, leaning on a stick I go, having climbed the mountain. [BL]
ខ ២៩ មេត្តិកា	**Verse 29 Mettikā**
ពិតមែនហើយ តែខ្ញុំជាអ្នករងទុក្ខ កំឡាំងថមថយ មានវ័យកន្លងជ្រុលហើយ ច្រត់ដម្បង ឡើងទៅលើភ្នំ។	The truth is that I am suffering and have lost my energy. I have grown old. I lean on a cane as I climb the mountain. [CU]
ខ ៣១ មិត្តា	**Verse 31 Mittā**
cātuddasiṃ pañcadasiṃ yā ca pakkhassa aṭṭhamī *pāṭihāriyapakkhañca aṭṭhaṅgasusamāgataṃ* *uposathaṃ upāgacchiṃ devakāyābhinandinī.*	On the fourteenth day and the fifteenth day, on the eighth day of the lunar fortnight, and on the extra holiday, I came to the *uposatha* where we assembled to follow the eightfold precepts, delighting [in the prospect of being reborn] amongst a group of gods. [BL]

ខ ៣២ មិត្តា	**Verse 32 Mittā**
ថ្ងៃនេះ ខ្ញុំនោះមានភត្តតែមួង កោរសក់ ដណ្តប់សង្ឃដី មិនគប្បីប្រាថ្នានូវពួកទេវតា (ណាមួយ) ទេ គប្បីបន្ទោបង់នូវសេចក្តី ក្រវល់ក្រវាយក្នុងហឫទ័យ (តែប៉ុណ្ណោះ) ។	Today I eat only one meal, my head shaved, my body covered with a robe. I don't wish [to be reborn in any realm of] the gods. I must rid myself of worries . . . that's all. [CU]
ខ ២៤ សុមង្គលា	**Verse 24 Sumaṅgalā**
អញបានផ្តាច់ផ្តិលរាគៈនិងទោសៈហើយ អញនោះចូលទៅរកគល់ឈើ ហើយ ចំរើនឈានជាសុខ ថា «ឱសុខណាស់តើ» ។	I got rid of my passion and anger. Having found the base of a tree, I settled into a blissful meditation, thinking, "What great bliss!" [CU]

CU = Translated from Khmer by Chinary Ung

BL = Translated from Pali by Bryan Levman

Chinary Ung is an astonishingly prolific composer, yet his focus is rarely turned inward. Indeed, one notes in his activities as a cultural leader and educator a profound sense of responsibility to a broader cultural and societal context. In the years since the holocaust Ung has worked with numerous institutions and individuals who share his dedication toward preserving Cambodian culture and forging cultural exchanges between Asia and the West, such as The Asian Cultural Council. He was President of the Khmer Studies Institute in the U.S.A. between 1980-1985, and was an advisor for the Killing Fields Memorial and Cambodian Heritage Museum of Chicago and a member of the Cambodian-Thai cultural committee.

As an educator, Ung has taught courses in Southeast Asian music and he has instructed generations of young composers at several institutions in the United States, and now, through a series of residencies, in Asia as well. In this regard he follows the example of his mentor, Chou Wen-chung. He holds appointments at UC San Diego, where he is Distinguished Professor of Music, and at Chapman University, where he is a Presidential Fellow and Senior Composer in Residence. His music has been recorded for Bridge, Cambria, CRI, New World, Argo, and oodiscs. Chinary Ung's compositions are published by C.F. Peters Corporation and are registered by BMI.

Susan Ung's interest in contemporary music for the viola began as a collaboration with her husband, Chinary Ung, on his first solo work for cello/viola, *Khse Buon*, in 1980. The opening of the work is based on her own viola improvisation inspired by Indian saranghi music. She became interested and involved in performances on various Asian and Indonesian instruments and improvisation. Her graduate study took place at Stony Brook University where her focus was on new music. She has been part of several premieres and recordings of her husband's works, in many venues across the U.S. as well as in New Zealand, Australia, South Korea, Cambodia, Vietnam, Thailand, Taiwan, the Philippines and China. She has recordings on Summit, New World Records, CRI, and Cambria, Bridge Records and BMOP.

James Baker is Principal Percussionist of the New York City Ballet Orchestra. He is Music Director and Conductor of the Composers Conference at Wellesley College and Director of the Percussion Ensemble and Coordinator of Percussion Studies at the Mannes College of Music. Mr. Baker is a Guest Conductor of the Slee Sinfonietta at the Institute for 21st Century Music in Buffalo and of Tactus at the Manhattan School of Music. He has conducted at the Transit New Music Festival in Belgium, at the Beijing Modern Music Festival, at the Monday Night concerts in Los Angeles, and Monadnock Music. He has for a number of years led composers' readings and recording seminars at Rice University, Harvard, Pitt, and Brigham Young University.

David Rentz is Associate Professor of Music at Chaffey College, where he heads the choral and vocal music programs. He has also taught and conducted choral ensembles at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Yale University, and, most recently, Pomona and Scripps Colleges. He is the artistic director and principal conductor of the Orchestra Collective of Orange County and co-conductor of C3LA (Contemporary Choral Collective of Los Angeles). David received a B.M. from Washington University, an M.M.at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and an M.M.A. and D.M.A. from the Yale University School of Music.

Gil Rose is a conductor helping to shape the future of classical music. In 1996, Mr. Rose founded the Boston Modern Orchestra Project (BMOP), an orchestra dedicated exclusively to performing and recording symphonic music of the twentieth and twenty-first century. Rose made his Tanglewood debut in 2002 and in 2003 debuted with the Netherlands Radio Symphony at the Holland Festival. He has led the American Composers Orchestra, Warsaw Philharmonic, National Symphony Orchestra of the Ukraine, Cleveland Chamber Symphony, Orchestra della Svizzera Italiana, and the National Orchestra of Porto. Mr. Rose has led the Monadnock Music Festival in Peterborough, NH, since his appointment as Artistic Director in 2012.

Producer: Chinary Ung

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Andrew Munsey (*Spiral XIV: Nimitta, Spiral XII: Space Between Heaven and Earth*)

Tom Erbe (*Spiral I*), Adam Borecki (*Therigatha Inside Aura*)

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Gil Rose Photograph: Irene Haupt

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Singing Inside Aura (2013): recorded in March 2014, UC San Diego

Spiral XIV: Nimitta (2012): recorded in November 2017, UC San Diego

Spiral I (1987): recorded in November 2013, UC San Diego

Therigatha Inside Aura (2018): recorded in March 2018, Scripps College

Spiral XII: Space Between Heaven and Earth (2008): recorded in November 2017, UC San Diego

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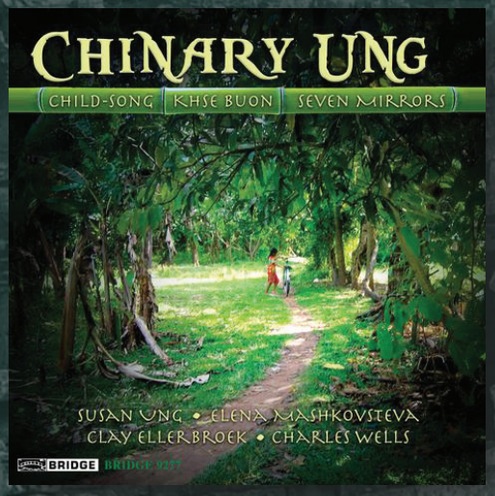
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Khse Buon
Child Song
Seven Mirrors

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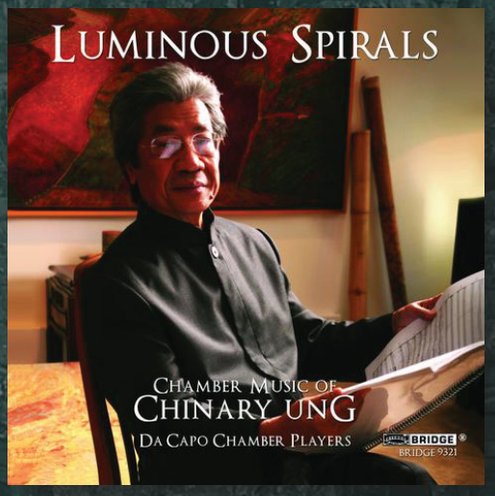

Chinary Ung, Vol. 2

Child Song
Luminous Spirals
Spiral VI
...still life after death...
Oracle

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Chinary Ung, Vol. 3

Spiral XI: Mother and Child
Spiral IX: Maha Sathukar

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